

House Bill 150
January 17, 2012
Presented by Jeff Hagener
House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Jeff Hagener, Director of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP). I am here in opposition House Bill 150.

FWP appreciates the frustration about wolf numbers and shares in the urgency to reduce numbers to more acceptable levels. We are working diligently to implement hunting and trapping seasons to increase harvest of wolves. FWP opposes this bill for both the fiscal impact, as noted in the fiscal note, and for how it treats wolves differently than other managed wildlife.

Funding from the sale of wolf licenses is important to help fund the wolf management program. Per 87-1-625, FWP must allocate at least \$900,000 annually for wolf management. Per 87-1-623, all wolf license revenue is deposited into a wolf management account for use in wolf management. This represents a significant portion of funding necessary for wolf management, especially since federal funding is not a certainty. If we assume that nearly all of the people who currently purchase a wolf license also purchase a big game license, and under this bill they would receive that wolf license at no cost, revenue into the wolf management account would drop to nearly zero.

Another issue with this bill requires the Department to issue free wolf licenses to game animal license purchasers unless the population drops below 200 wolves. Per FWP's wolf management plan, Montana is committed to maintaining at least 15 breeding pairs of wolves. Fifteen breeding pairs pretty much equals 250 wolves (based on fact that each breeding pair corresponds to 16-17 wolves in Montana). At this level, wolf hunting would likely be closed, so we would be required to issue licenses for a season that is closed.

We understand the intent of this bill to be getting more licenses in the hands of big game hunters who might then have an opportunistic chance at taking a wolf while out big game hunting. That is a concept we agree with. A compromise would be to explore options for a reduced-price wolf license to a hunter who purchases a Sportsman License (residents) or Nonresident Big Game Combination License (nonresident). For example, we could offer a resident wolf license for an additional \$10 to the Sportsman License (vs. \$19 standalone), and a nonresident wolf license for an additional \$35 to Nonresident Big Game Combination License (vs. proposed \$50 standalone). This is the sort of licensing option we have for black bears. Unfortunately, the specificity of this bill title precludes amending this bill with this type of language. FWP would be happy to work with the sponsor to develop an alternative bill that could include this type of win-win language.

As written and for the reasons stated, FWP recommends a Do Not Pass on HB 150.